



Post Arab-Spring State Building and Security and Stability in Tunisia

Executive Summary

The Arab Spring, a series of anti-authoritarian, pro-democracy revolts in the Arab world, started innocuously in Tunisia. Mohamed Bouazizi, a peasant from Sidi Bouzid, had become distraught over apparent official high-handedness and corruption amid stultifying poverty and in protest publicly committed suicide. That action was the cue that long suffering Tunisians needed to be rid of the long-standing dictator, Zein al-Abedine Ben Ali. The success of the revolution in Tunisia spurred similar revolts in other Arab countries. But while the other Arab countries are still in turmoil, Tunisia appears to have rebounded. In 2011, Tunisians elected a Constituent Assembly to craft a new constitution that would form the basis of a new social compact. Despite the many challenges that nearly scuttled the work of the assembly, including two high-profile political assassinations and the sacking of two transition regimes, the assembly adopted the new constitution on 26 January 2014. The final product, a compromise between Islamists and secularists, is commended as the most liberal in the Arab world. Building on this success, the country will hold national assembly elections in October 2014 and a presidential election in November 2014. Both elections, despite the threat of violence by extremists, are most likely to be peaceful. Generally, it is felt, things are in the upswing in Tunisia, making the country the “lone Arab Spring success story” or “the most promising of the Arab Spring countries.”

Still, many of the conditions that sparked the Tunisian uprising(s) have not abated. Unemployment continues to be above 30%, prices of commodities continue to rise, official corruption is still rife, and poverty remains a challenge. These are complicated by terrorist activities around the country’s border with Algeria. In addition, the political class is deeply divided with Islamist and secularist politicians toeing hardline that incessantly heat up the polity. Tensions between both groups often collage nationally, creating new dynamics of conflict among the population. This special report illuminates ongoing developments in Tunisia, particularly citizens’ perspectives about the state of the country post-revolution. The report finds that:

- a. Tunisians’ high enthusiasm for change immediately following the ouster of the Ben Ali regime has diminished considerably over the last three years due mainly to the fractious nature of politics, which has failed to reverse some of the conditions that sparked the Jasmine Revolution. However, over the last year, especially with the appointment of Mehdi Jomaa as prime minister and the adoption of the new constitution, Tunisians are showing more enthusiasm and confidence both in the direction of change and in the performance of their government.
- b. Many more Tunisians will vote in the upcoming elections than voted in 2011. This is not just because many youths will come off age and be able to vote, but because Tunisians are eager to use the ballot to effect positive change.
- c. The elections have a very low likelihood of violence. If violence occurs, it will not be from parties/candidates and voters but from extremists hoping to thwart the elections. However, Tunisians have high confidence in the ability of the security forces (not civilian armed groups) to contain them. More importantly, Tunisians are likely to vote out the Islamist Ennahda Party, overwhelming favorites in 2011, in favor of the secularist Nida Tounes Party.

Introduction

No one predicted the series of democratic transitions that upturned the Arab world in 2011. Since 2011, many major and minor political and social revolutions have occurred in the region, beginning in Tunisia with what is now known as the “Jasmine Revolution,”¹ which is named after the Tunisian national flower. That revolution, which was in the making for several years, came to a head in January 2011 after a 26 year old Tunisian peasant, Mohamed Bouazizi, a fruit vendor from Sidi Bouzid, publicly committed suicide following an altercation with law enforcement.² Not only was the Jasmine Revolution not predicted, its unfolding was also not sufficiently understood by the major players in the region and the West, which since 9/11 tries to anticipate such major socio-political change. At least, this explains why the events in Tunisia quickly spread to other parts of the Arab world, catching Arab governments and observers off guard and leading to the upturning of authoritarian governments once thought to be unimpeachable.

The “Arab Spring,”³ as the revolutionary events in the Arab world came to be called, is both a metonym and a euphoric phrase for the series of anti-authoritarian revolutions and revolutionary movements that either ousted long-standing dictators or significantly whittled their powers. It created enormous social, political, cultural, and economic upheaval and turbulence in the Arab world and is particularly remarkable because it appeared to be a “unified and homogenous collective struggle of the subjugated Arab peoples against their non-responsive repressive governments,”⁴ raising hopes for the liberalization of politics and the elimination of impunity, unfairness, and injustice that had characterized socio-economic life in the Arab world.

Although much of the turmoil, at least in terms of the uprisings, has abated, the Arab world is still reeling from the effects of the revolutions. Egypt and Libya have continued to experience turbulence on an unprecedented scale⁵ three years after long-standing dictators were removed, and Syria have virtually imploded with the dramatic dwindling of the power and influence of Bashar Al-Assad, its long-standing dictator who maybe maintained in power by his links to Russia, China, and Iran. The continuing turbulence in the region, especially wrangling amongst erstwhile comrades, suggests that the centripetal force of the Arab Spring movements may not have originated from shared understanding of universal principles of democratic politics,⁶ but from parochial or particularistic interests. Indeed, while the revolution removed historically entrenched strongmen from power, the ruling elites and clandestine state structures that they built over many years as well as the powerful secret services and crony capitalists they created or nurtured⁷ have molted into the crowd of “revolutionaries.” The new Arab states that these phantom revolutionaries are helping to create is both distorting and thwarting the original objectives of the revolutions by enplacing enforced constraints that curtail, instead of expand freedoms. This further suggests that the Arab Spring is significant only in terms of the scale of turbulence it has unleashed and not much else.

Despite this presumably bleak outlook, Tunisia, which by all accounts is the birthplace of the Arab revolutions, appears to be the exception in the region. Although it is still battling violent jihadists and tensions between Islamists and secularists are not abating, Tunisia appears to have quickly recovered from the chaos precipitated by the Jasmine Revolution. The revolution ended the long-time rule of Zein al-Abedine Ben Ali, thrust up a new cadre of leaders or repositioned old ones, and encouraged wide-ranging reforms in its polity including a new constitution that guarantees the equality of men and women,

protects freedom of worship, and forbids declaring Muslims as apostates – a tactic often employed by Islamists and hardliners to justify sectarian violence.⁸ These gains have prompted some observers to describe Tunisia as the “lone Arab Spring success story”^{9 10} or “the most promising of the Arab Spring countries.”¹¹

But despite the reforms and the other tentative gains made in Tunisia, are Tunisians happy with the situation in the country? Considering that the Arab Spring was primarily a revolt against the prevailing system of injustice, judicial corruption, governing elite impunity, lack of freedom, and lack of economic access, do Tunisians believe that they are better off now than they were before the Arab Spring? Specifically, is the gap between the rich and poor narrower (or wider) now than before the revolts? Do Tunisians feel freer and more empowered now than they were before the revolts? Recent studies¹² indicate that even though disillusionment with the political state and lack of economic access is high among citizens, there is increasing confidence in the expanded justice system with citizens generally feeling freer and more empowered now than during the dictatorship of Ben Ali.

This mixed result suggests that the peace in Tunisia at the moment is at best tenuous and the elections of October and November 2014 have the potential to both deepen Tunisian democracy and entrench peace or to create obstacles that can fracture the tenuous peace. The potential for election-related crisis, especially considering the rumpus triggered by the assassination of two opposition politicians – Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi –¹³ is worrisome because of suggestions that citizen trust in courts, the Assembly of National Constitution (or National Assembly), political parties, and elected officials of government, is abysmally low.¹⁴

Understanding the effects of ongoing socio-political reforms including election-related tensions on a fragile state like Tunisia is enormously important not only because of the volatility of the region but also because of Tunisia’s history of political stability and socio-economic progress. Although Tunisians lacked political freedom during the dictatorship of Ben Ali and the regime of Habib Bourguiba, the country was socially and economically progressive. For instance, in 1956 a personal status code inserted into the country’s constitution abolished polygamy, divorce by a husband’s simple repudiation, and male tutelage of women,¹⁵ and in 1973, abortion was legalized in Tunisia, making the country an aberration in a region characterized by patriarchy and the condensing of women’s rights and gender power. Also, Tunisia’s secularism helped to create a dynamic socio-cultural space that expanded learning and health care, boosted Tunisia’s Tourism industry, and created a vibrant middle class.^{16 17} Considering these developments, it is not surprising that Tunisia was the first to experience the Arab Spring and the first to rebound from it. But how will prevailing political, social, and economic conditions in Tunisia influence local perception about freedom, justice, and economic prosperity as well as trust and respect for the ongoing reforms and the political state? More importantly, since Tunisia will be holding landmark elections in October and November 2014, how will the prevailing socio-political and economic conditions and local perception about these conditions affect both the conduct and outcome of the elections? In essence, should Tunisians and observers expect anything other than peace and quiet after the October and November elections in Tunisia?

To answer these questions, this analysis is structured into four parts. This introduction and the statement of theoretical and methodological considerations that follow constitute the first section. Section two discusses a range of issues associated with the upcoming elections in Tunisia, including the activities of

terrorists, weak economy, and the political class – issues that may affect the elections. Section three discusses Tunisians perception of ongoing reforms, the political state, and governance. All of these issues are helpful in determining whether the country is stable enough to hold two major elections and whether violence will characterize the process. Section four presents the conclusion of this report.

Theoretical Considerations

Different theories have been used to explain revolutions and rebellions in every part of the world including Africa. Some of these theories see revolution as following a natural history in that it is typically a culmination of a series of qualitatively unique developmental stages. These stages form a standard sequence such that the final revolutionary or rebellious stage (the actual breakout of hostilities) cannot occur unless other preceding stages have been complete. Although natural history theorists are convinced that revolutions follow a standard order of events, they are not in agreement as to the specific number of stages or of the nature of these stages. For example, in Brinton's analysis, the stages involve (in this order) widespread governmental inefficiency, the desertion of the government by the intellectuals, the development of popular revolutionary excitement leading to the overthrow of the regime (or the failure of the movement), a period of rule by moderate revolutionary elements, the rule of terror and violence, and finally a return to the status quo ante.¹⁸

Of more relevance to this report, however, is Davies's *J-Curve of revolution*.¹⁹ Although Davies does not present a scheme of stages like Brinton, he suggests that a set of qualitative developmental changes leads to revolutionary outbreaks and that the full realization of all of these changes is necessary before a revolution can take place. The heart of his theory is that revolutions "are most likely to occur when a prolonged period of economic or social development is followed by a short period of sharp reversal."²⁰ He finds evidence for this pattern in three successful revolutions: Dorr's revolution in early nineteenth century Rhode Island; the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Russia; and the Egyptian Revolution of 1952. It is this pattern that he calls the "J-curve" of need-satisfaction where the progressive period of increasing satisfaction represents the shaft of the J and the sharp downturn represents its crook.

Using the J-curve, it is possible to discuss the Jasmine Revolution and the larger Arab Spring revolutions as deriving the long upward slope of the J-curve from the tyranny of authoritarian regimes like that of Ben Ali's in Tunisia, which expanded the wealth and influence of a tiny minority and condensed the rights and freedom of the overwhelming majority. The socio-political and economic power that the elite wielded (including the corruption of the state and its officials) stood in contradistinction to the socio-political and economic alienation of the majority of the people, especially the bulging class of youths. According to William Quandt, the survival of authoritarian regimes predicate on four interconnected motions: 'ideology, repression, payoffs, and elite solidarity.'²¹ In Tunisia and other Arab countries, the dictator had become bereft of ideas to extend his rule beyond utilizing payoff (such as the unregulated, whimsical billion dollar food subsidies in Tunisia and Egypt and the housing, health care, and education subsidies in Ghadafi's Libya) and repression (wherein Arab regimes used violence as they pleased without institutionalized checks and balances).²²

The ideological component – that helped to entrench the regimes in the first place and that was needed both to ensure elite solidarity and to purchase citizen acquiescence – had become moribund and ineffectual. In place of the socialist and developmental idealism that had enabled them to seize power and remain in power, Arab dictators began to espouse neo-liberal ideas and conspiratorial nationalism, which

blamed economic failure and socio-political marginalization on a “shadowy and shifting coalition of external actors.”²³ These ideas, especially the nationalist paranoia that attempted to justify continued misrule failed to gain resonance with the youths whose number had increased by over 50% since 1990²⁴ and were ideologically removed from the post-colonial heroics of nationalists like Habib Bourguiba, who established an authoritarian regime that resembled a presidential monarchy and was elected for life until he was toppled in 1987.²⁵ But the final “sharp reversal” precipitating the revolution was Bouzazi’s self-immolation, which unmasked the face of tyranny and injustice in Tunisia and the entire Arab world. Bouzazi’s self-inflicted death demonstrated the utterly miserable economic and social conditions of Arab peasants and youths, triggering a wave of self-preservation protests that succeeded in upturning not only Arab regimes but also the bases of order in those countries.

Despite criticisms of Davies’ J-curve, and there are many, including that it posits a single state of mind for all members of the coalition, the idea of a J-curve in terms of the Arab uprisings is appealing and has explanatory power, at least, for the formation of the revolutions. The theory may be combined with political process theories to explain post-revolution state building including the fractious nature of post-revolution society that has seen former comrades fighting with each other over territory, ideology, political office, and financial gain. The political process theory of revolution^{26 27 28} illuminates understanding of the relationship between revolutionaries and the political state on the one hand and revolutionaries themselves on the other and offers a framework for understanding and explaining post-revolution Arab societies.

Political process theorists, from their reading of natural history theories, suggest that the level of conflict is likely to increase after the first major actions of the mass and that the struggle between the two polities is likely to “produce a polarized form of conflict” that activates supporters across both sides of the divide. They also contend that the phases of a revolution are not dependent on changes in the orientation of the population or in the position of any single group, but in the “relations among contenders and government.”²⁹ Thus, the major obstacle to post-revolution state building and stability result from two large processes: the struggle of those who have ousted or supplanted a regime to maintain control over areas or populations in its control; and the breaking up of the revolutionary coalition and the effort of some members to exclude other members from influence. The breaking up of the coalition may be a) in response to “considerable resistance” of its attempt to gain control over a population, b) the larger coalition required to begin the revolution is not needed to maintain, sustain, or build an alternative government; c) differences in the objectives and interests of the coalesced elements have become more salient and more serious after the initial staging of protests; and d) those elements that mobilized rapidly in support of the revolution because of short-term crisis but which interests are not necessarily the interests of the core elements in the revolution have demobilized or formed factions more rapidly than other elements.³⁰ These principles frame this analysis of post-revolution state building in Tunisia. They help demonstrate the fact that how a revolution is planned, organized, implemented, and supported has implications not only for the legitimacy of the revolution but also for how it transitions into formal stable governance.

Methodology

This mixed-method study uses secondary quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data comes from an already analyzed February 2014 survey of the International Republican Institute (IRI). The

survey was conducted on behalf of the IRI by ELKA Consulting, a Tunisian marketing research firm, and led by David Williams of the firm of Williams and Associates, Salem, Massachusetts. The data was collected nationwide from 12 February 2014 to 22 February 2014, using in-person, face-to-face approach with 1,232 Tunisians aged 18 and above.

The researchers used a multi-stage stratification sampling method to collect data. The population was stratified and selected in three parts: (1) proportional division of Tunisia's 24 governorates, (2) proportional division of urban and rural categories, and (3) proportional division by gender and age group based on 2009 data from Tunisia's National Statistics Institute. Each of Tunisia's 24 governorates was further divided into territorial sections with at least one point of survey selected randomly from each section. The number of points was determined by population density. Points of survey were distributed proportionally between rural and urban areas in each governorate and in all geographical sections of the governorates. The researchers used the Kish method to select respondents within randomly selected households. Further, they used the left-hand method to select every third household in the geographical area through an area probability sample. Tables, charts, graphs, and simple percentages were used to present the results.

The secondary qualitative data comes from numerous open sources. The research used the Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) to conduct a cross-disciplinary content analysis of academic literature on the broad topics of the Tunisian Revolution, Jasmine Revolution, and Arab Spring Revolution as well as relevant story synopsis from magazines, newspapers, official gazettes, blogs, and social media reports. The data, a vast body of work, were sorted into relevant theoretical and analytical domains using the NVIVO qualitative data analytic software. The analysis of both the primary and secondary data follows a theoretical model to understand the data as part of a process of induction. The inductive coding process helped to identify a set of interpretive frames and narrative structures that permits understanding of the ongoing socio-political transformation of Tunisia from the perspective of Tunisian citizens.

Tunisian Elections – The Major Issues

On 26 October and 23 November 2014 respectively, Tunisians will go to the polls to elect a new parliament and a new President. This will mark the final transition from the Ben Ali dictatorship to a popular democracy won through enormous strife, toil, and sacrifice. A new constitution approved by the National Assembly in January 2014 and considered the most liberal and progressive in the Arab world helped to set the stage for these elections that will be hotly contested. However, several factors including terrorist activities, especially near the country's border with Algeria, an economy too slow to rebound, and a deeply divided political class, threatens the election process.³¹ This in no way suggests that the election may not hold or that violence might characterize the process; but that these forces, which loomed large in the 2011 revolts and subsequent turmoil following the assassination of two leading secular politicians, are silhouetted within the country's fragile political architecture and have the potential to escalate tensions during the elections. It is necessary to examine these threats briefly.

Terrorist Activities

About two weeks ago, masked gunmen attacked Mohammad al-Nasri, an influential politician, who was forced to jump from his second floor apartment into safety. Several days after the attack, Tunisian law enforcement said it arrested 12 men it suspects of plotting to cause mayhem during the elections. Earlier

in the month, the Tunisian prime minister, Mehdi Jomaa, warned that terrorists were planning operations to scuttle the elections, forcing the government to call up reservists to actively patrol venues designated for the October and November elections.³² The elections could be complicated by the fight against extremists in a country riven by violent upheaval and the escalation of tensions between Islamists and secularists. In continuing operations against extremists, spokesman for Tunisia's Ministry of Interior, Mohammed Ali Laroui, says law enforcement broke up terrorist cells in four governorates: Sidi Bouzid, Kasserine, Sousse, and Monastir. He claims that the cells provide logistic and material support to extremist fighters operating in Mount Chaambi. Tunisian authorities believe the extremists were also plotting to assassinate key political figures and to attack military and security facilities across the country.

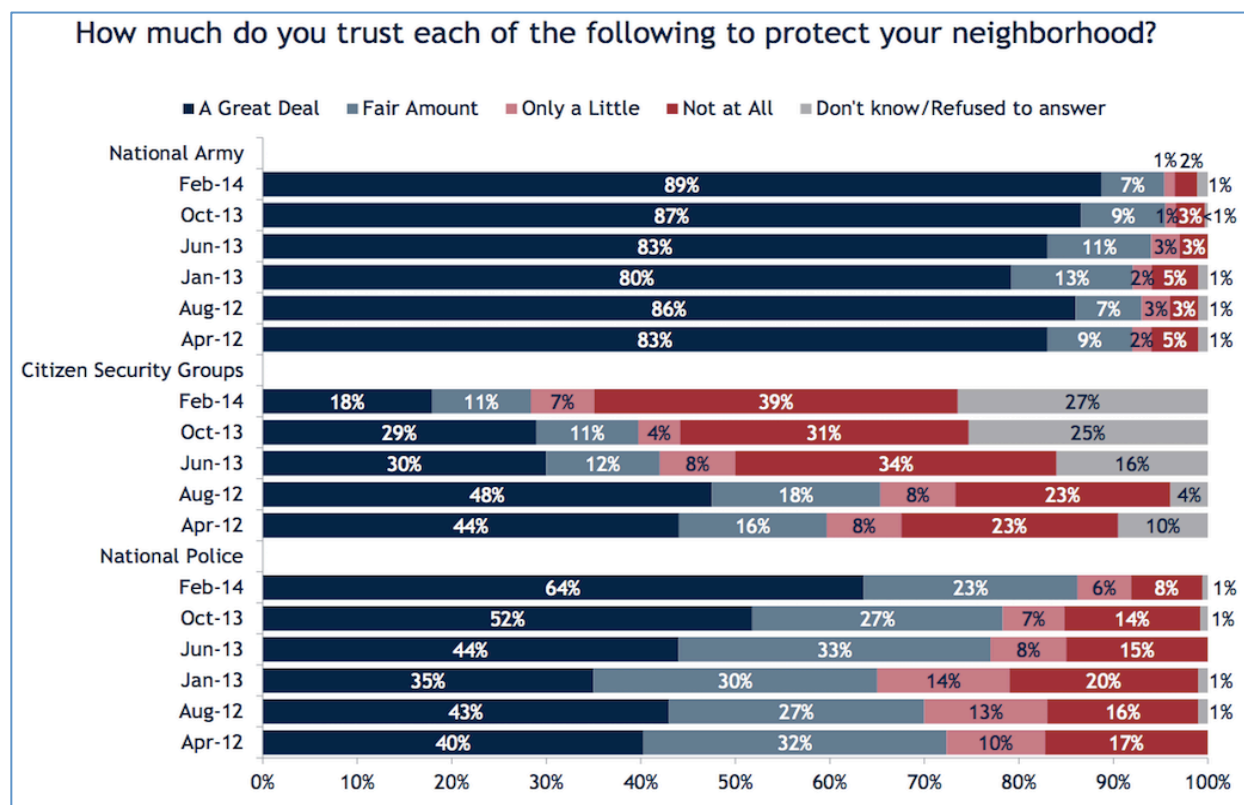
Since the Tunisian uprising that torpedoed the regime of Ben Ali, extremist Islamist groups have increased in the country forcing clashes with moderates and secularists. The rising influence of Islamists triggered frenetic counter measures by law enforcement, which has produced clashes between soldiers and heavily armed insurgents in areas around the country's border with Algeria. On the other hand, the hardening of government's response to the threat posed by extremists has prompted violent rhetoric from Tunisia's Ansar al-Shariah, which has declared war on the state. According to a spokesperson for the group, "you have mistaken our tolerance for weakness ... you only understand the logic of force and only hear the noise of bullets."³³ The group's statement also pledged allegiance both to Ayman Zawahri, the Al-Qaeda leader, and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the self-professed caliph of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) that has continued its slaughter of innocent civilians in Syria and Iraq including videotaped beheadings of Western citizens.^{34 35 36 37} Sources believe ISIS is holding about 20 Westerners hostage who could face similar fates.³⁸

In July 2014, the ambush killing of 12 Tunisian soldiers by Islamists near the Algerian border helped to unite public angst against the Islamists and forced the Tunisian government to crackdown against mosques and Muslim organizations it suspects of recruiting and funding insurgents.³⁹ Though this move heightened fears of major crackdowns against Muslim political movements as happened in Egypt with the Muslim Brotherhood party as well as sectarian clashes within Tunisia, the fight against extremists has continued to receive the support of Muslim and secular political groups in the country. Yet, many fear that a huge win for the moderate Ennahda party – which in the past was accused of, at least, tacitly supporting extremists – in the scheduled elections will bolster extremists and plunge the country into further crisis. There is reason for this apprehension. In 2012, waves of violence over the role of Islam rocked several Tunisian cities. In one case, hundreds of Islamic extremists protesting the sale of alcohol attacked a police station in Jendouba in May 2012⁴⁰ spreading violence to eight other regions, prompting the imposition of overnight curfew in those regions.⁴¹ The protests and violence by the Islamists as well as the suggestion by the draft constitution to subordinate women to men also prompted counter-protests by moderates and secularists in August 2012.⁴² Protest attacks against the U.S. Embassy in September 2012 by Ansar al-Shariah and further protests against social objects including art exhibits, movies, and secularists by the group continued through 2013 prompting clashes with law enforcement and culminating in the resignation of Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali of the Ennahda party.

Nevertheless, survey data show that Tunisian's trust their country's security forces including the army (89% up from 80% in the comparable period in 2013) and the police (64% up from 35% in the comparable period in 2013) to deal with the country's security problems and protect the neighborhoods. In contrast to high levels of trust for security forces, respondents generally expressed low levels of trust

for citizen security groups in Tunisia. Considering the situation in Libya and Syria where the revolts have either severely weakened or delegitimized the country's security forces and enabled hundreds of citizen militias to form and complicate the security problematic, citizen distrust for citizen security groups in Tunisia is understood.

Figure 1: Responses measuring citizen trust in Tunisian security forces

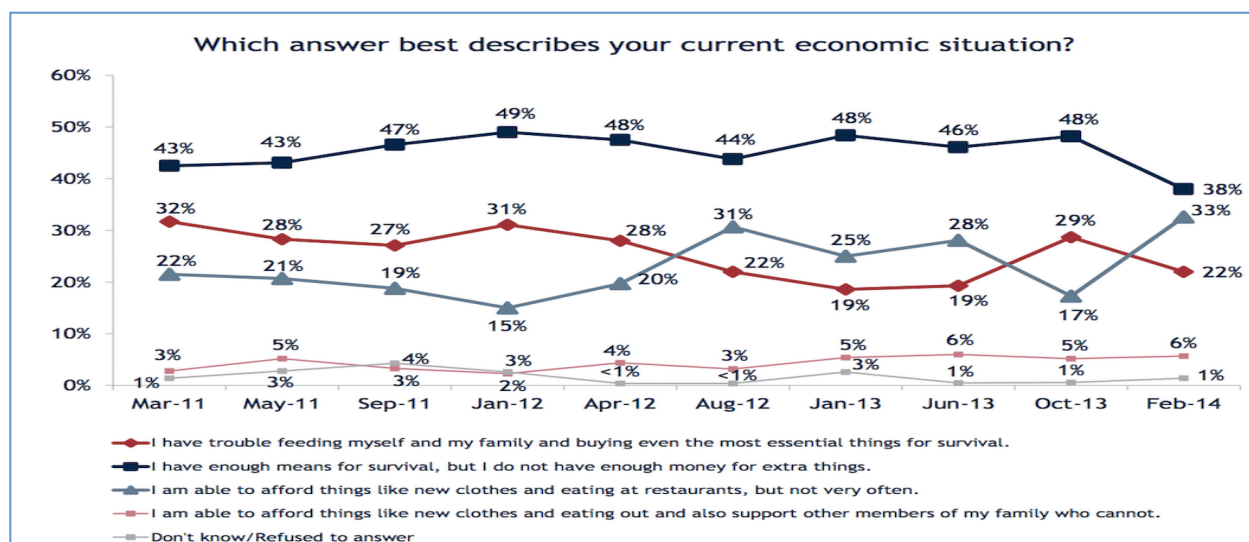


Weak Economy

Historically a “granary of the Mediterranean,”⁴³ Tunisia’s economy has been dominated at various times by agriculture, petroleum, and tourism. But declining oil outputs, increasing desertification, and terrorist activities since 9/11 in combination with authoritarian rule conspired to put enormous economic pressures on local populations, triggering the Jasmine Revolution. In the years after the revolution, the economic situation has not improved, creating tensions and conflict between ordinary people and authorities. As one observer put it, “The ordinary people went to the streets because they cannot buy milk ... it was the same as under Ben Ali.”⁴⁴ Youth unemployment continues to be high, food prices continue to soar, and attempts to attract critical international investments to help grow the local economy have continued to flounder despite ongoing reforms including reform of unfavorable business laws.

Survey results indicate that only 6% of respondents (up from 3% in the comparable period in 2011) say they have enough resources for themselves but cannot afford to support others. Most respondents (38% up from 43% in the comparable period in 2011) have barely enough resources for survival and cannot afford to spend money on other things. This suggests that Tunisians are still hurting economically, which may explain the several mini revolutions after Jasmine that has cost Ennahda politically.

Figure 2: Respondents self-assessment of their economic situations



Worsening perception of Tunisia's economy is exacerbated by the unemployment situation, which the survey shows worry most respondents (67%). The desperate economic conditions of Tunisian communities may be contributing to terrorism in the country, which 50% of respondents say is an enduring concern and trumps concern about corruption (13%), political conflicts (9%), and elections (2%).

The slow pace of economic recovery efforts continues to frustrate local populations. For instance, in March 2013, a 27-year old cigarette vendor, Adel Khazri, set himself on fire in Tunis, the Tunisian capital due to financial difficulties.⁴⁵ As he burned, Khazri continued to shout, "this is Tunisia, this is unemployment," refocusing attention to the pre-revolution economic and social tensions that spurred the type of desperation that led to Bouazizi's self-immolation in 2010. The unemployment rate for Tunisia's youths, especially those with a university education is about 30% unemployment rate, which partly results from the fact that the country's educational system only equips youths for placement in the civil service and not for entrepreneurship. In addition, the country's tax codes and business regulations appear to discriminate against local companies in favor of foreign business, producing "an economy which is largely stuck into low value added activities, and generates mainly low wage and insecure jobs."⁴⁶ Even a new government program established to provide "a civil service job to at least one member of every family"⁴⁷ is based on the existing template of bloated civil service and dwindling private investment and is incapable of reversing the economic crisis even in the short term. Moreover, the program can only provide about 1,250 jobs across Tunisia's 24 governorates with over 200,000 applicants.

Many of those who joined the revolution in 2011 were motivated by economic grievances. For these people, not much has changed since the toppling of the Ben Ali regime. Although these youths perceive the revolution and the associated reforms as monumental steps towards progress, they are beginning to show signs of weariness that reforms will bring the desired change even though they are waiting to see whether the upcoming elections will improve the economic situation. Key to economic progress will be investments in the private sector including foreign direct investment, which might have received major

boosts from the ongoing reforms that ought to make Tunisia a preferred destination for private sector investment. The elections of October and November, especially if Ennahda does not overwhelmingly dominate, may give confidence to investors as well as tourists to return to Tunisia and help reduce the tensions that have frequently driven protests and violence in the country.

Political Class

The Jasmine and Arab Spring revolutions were products of the conditions of Arab societies including the disappearance of commodities from grocery stores in local communities, increasing youth unemployment and rising inflation, the vanishing legitimacy of the incompetent and corrupt managers of state power and the resulting impetus for brutal repression of all constitutional and unconstitutional challenges to state power, the intensification of poverty Tunisia (and all over the Arab world), and the manipulation of the political system to exploit and marginalize local populations. The above conditions diminished all possibilities of self-actualization and threatened even mere physical existence, creating a debilitating but corrosive sense of helplessness in local populations. As Claude Ake would argue, this means that the revolutions were a collective “expression of the will to survive.” The spontaneously devised will of the common people to redress the parlous state of the economy and to reduce their vulnerability to a predatory state with repressive institutions, engendered popular empowerment, energized civil society, and strengthened the collective will to struggle for democratic reform, including reforms of Arab political systems. Recognizing the importance of such enabling environments in precipitating the crisis and in stalling post-revolution stability, despite a battery of reforms, is critical to any analysis of the Tunisian condition, especially as Tunisians count down to the 26 October and 23 November 2014 elections.

There is a sense that the political reforms may not be root deep considering the fractious nature of political contestation and increasing hostilities among the political class. Many worry that extremists can exploit disagreements among the political class to derail the elections and cause serious setback for the country. Since 2011, suspicions among the political class has resulted in political crises including what many call a “second revolution,” which has surreptitiously diminished the influence of the Ennahda Muslim party that initially emerged the main political beneficiary of the toppling of Ben Ali. The party won majority seats in the 2011 parliamentary elections and produced the country’s first post-Ben Ali prime minister. But the tensions between Islamists and secularists, which resulted in the killing of two leading secularist politicians, eventually led to the forced resignation of the prime minister and his replacement with the moderate Mehdi Jomaa. As the elections near, the tensions between politicians and political parties have increased, creating fears of the potential relapse of the fragile peace in the country.

Survey data supports the suggestion that Ennahda’s political influence is slightly diminished. For instance, while 27% of respondents say they voted for Ennahda in 2011, only about 19% of respondents that voted in 2011 say they intend to vote for the same party. As has been observed already, the reason for this is not far-fetched; increasing frustration with the political class, especially escalating tensions between Islamists and secularists coupled with unrelenting youth unemployment, poverty, and soaring food prices suggests that Ennahda may not have what it takes to spur economic growth and development. Moreover, the post-revolution enthusiasm for change, particularly change based on a return to morality and fiscal discipline that had galvanized local people and that resulted in the backing of Islamist parties in Tunisia and Egypt, had worn off. In place of that mostly naïve enthusiasm is realization that Islamist parties, because of their robust orientation towards spiritual determinism, may not have the ability to

maintain functioning governance institutions in societies as divided as Tunisia, especially given the challenges of rebuilding a society torn apart by socio-political strife and turmoil.

Figure 6: Respondents Party Preferences

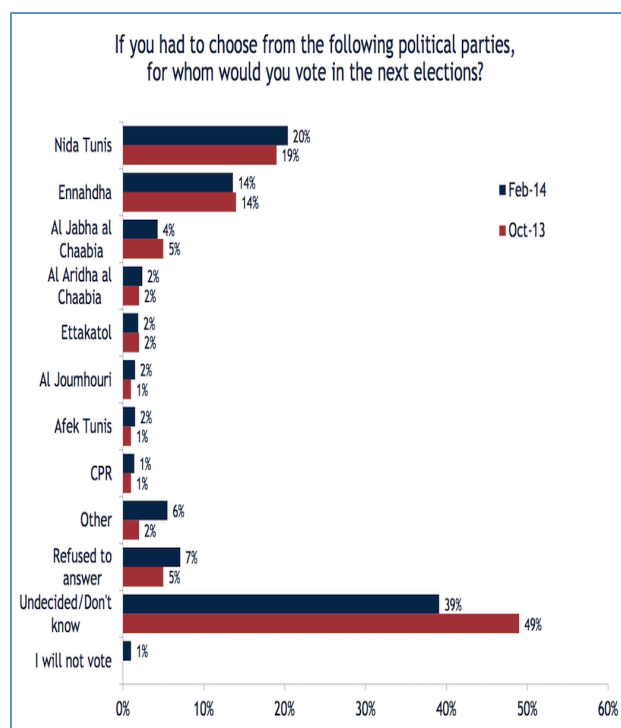
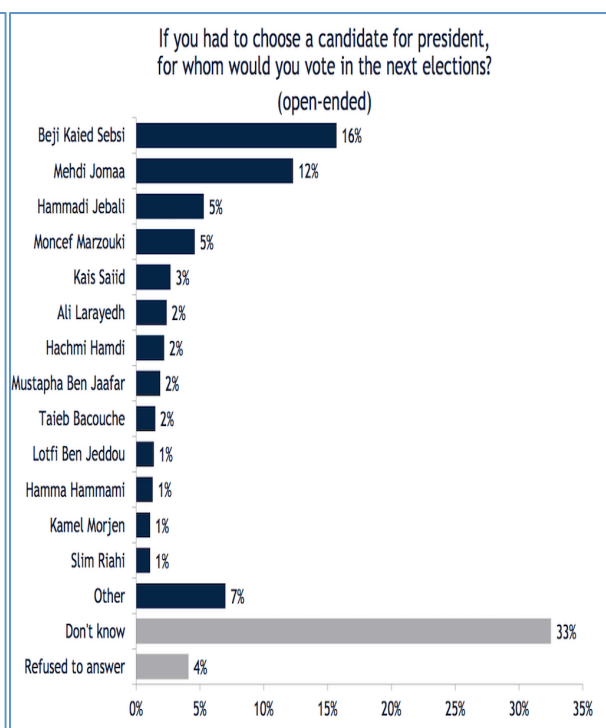


Figure 7: Respondents Preferences for President



Several factors are likely to influence the direction of votes during the elections including the ability of Tunisian security forces to check the activities of extremists, the preservation of Tunisia's secularist principles despite the rising influence of Islamists, the continuing influence of experienced politicians who were part of the Ben Ali years, and popular perception of the ability of candidates and parties to effect positive economic change. Of these, the influence of experienced politicians including remnants of the Ben Ali regime may have the most effect on the direction of votes. For instance, veteran politicians or members of the "old guard" are behind the formation of several of the new parties vying to control the government.⁴⁸

The largest of these new parties is the *Nida Tounes* or "the Tunisian Call" founded by the 87-years old Beji Caid Sebsi, who became prime minister immediately after the ouster of Ben Ali. Nida Tounes is supported by family-run businesses that disliked the influence of the Trabelsi family – in-laws to Ben Ali – during Ben Ali's authoritarian rule as well as Ennahdha's victory in the 2011 parliamentary elections. The party, which is generally seen as pro-business, is also seen as pro-worker because a former trade unionist, Taieb Baccouche, is its secretary-general. However, the party is drawing criticism from many citizens who want a clean break from the past because Caid Sebsi's high-profile political adviser is Muhammad Ghariani, former secretary-general of the Constitutional Democratic Rally, the party of Ben Ali.⁴⁹ The new parties reliance on key members of the old regime is suggestive that the Jasmine may only have succeeded in dislodging certain members of the former regime while preserving their structures and

their enlightened interests. In fact, survey data indicate that new parties like Nida Tounes have gained on Ennahda since that party's marginal victory in 2011. For instance, majority of respondents (20%) prefer Nida Tounes (Nida Tunis) to Ennahda (14%) and majority of respondents (16%) would vote for Beji Kaied Sebsi, the Nida Tounes leader, instead of other parties candidates including Mehdi Jomaa (14%), the incumbent prime minister.

However, with about 15,652 candidates on the ballot, the new parties may not have the type of clout and spread to comprehensively defeat Ennahda, whose experience in 2011 gives it an edge over rivals. In addition, women who are more likely to challenge for positions using the platforms of the smaller and newer parties, are unlikely to fair better in this election than 2011 even though Article 24 of the election law mandates gender parity. As the Carter Center observes, while the election law requires all electoral lists to alternate female and male candidates, "it does not mandate horizontal parity, meaning there is no requirement that a female candidate appear at the top of the lists."⁵⁰ The Center says it is the lack of horizontal parity that is likely to result in fewer women being elected to the assembly.

Skepticism about the true agenda of the new political class, however, is unlikely to prevent it from defeating Ennahda in the October parliamentary elections and produce the next prime minister. The fiasco Ennahda's brief rule and the fact that it was forced to cede ground, especially allowing the formation of a non-party cabinet of technocrats in January 2014 as well as continuing high unemployment, soaring food prices, and sporadic clashes between security forces and armed extremists are conspiring to hand it defeat in the coming elections despite having won 37% of the votes and 89 of 217 seats in the constituent assembly in 2011.⁵¹ Such is its diminished political status that it does not have confidence in its ability to win the presidential elections (slated for November 2014) alone. Instead, it is calling for consensus and appealing to other parties to join in electing a "consensus candidate" that can help calm the polity and unify the country in this time of great social, political, and economic uncertainty.⁵² Beji Kaied Sebsi is highly favored to win the presidential election in November.

Perception of Ongoing Reforms, the State, and Governance

Survey data recorded from February to March 2014 in Tunisia illuminate understanding of Tunisian's perception of post-revolution political developments, especially ongoing reforms and the new Tunisian constitution. This assessment contributes a unique perspective on (1) how Tunisians about the changes in the country, particularly about the direction of change considering the relative socio-political stability of the country under the dictatorship of Ben Ali, (2) whether some or all of the conditions that sparked both the Jasmine Revolution and the Arab Spring revolutions persist in the country and the reaction of Tunisians to this persistence, (3) whether violence is likely to accompany the 26 October parliamentary elections and the 23 November presidential election based on persisting tensions among the political class, particularly tensions between Islamists and secularists, and (4) whether Ennahda, which emerged the dominant political party in the 2011 elections into the Constituent Assembly is likely to emerge dominant again or whether significant political developments since its 2011 election win has helped to diminish its influence as the 2014 elections near.

Perception of the New Constitution

One of the main outcomes of the Jasmine Revolution is the reform of Tunisia's political, social, and judicial systems. The highlight of the reforms, however, was the creation of a new Constitution, which

was passed into law on 26 January 2014. Preparations for the new constitution and the larger socio-political reforms started with the 23 October 2011 election into the country's Constituent Assembly. From the moment that assembly was inaugurated, they began work to create a new constitution. Members of the assembly had to navigate many contentious issues including the important distinction between Tunisia as an Islamist state and the Tunisian government as a secularist one. In fact, local tensions had increased following the release of a draft of the constitution that analysts believed was a setback for the country. Despite the tensions and suspicions, the constitution that was passed in January continues to be seen in the West as liberal and able to guarantee rights and freedoms. But how do Tunisians see the new constitution? Are they even aware of the promulgation of a new constitution to replace the old one that was enacted by the Habib Bourguiba regime on 1 June 1959 and amended in

Figure 8: Percentage of Respondents who knew about new constitution

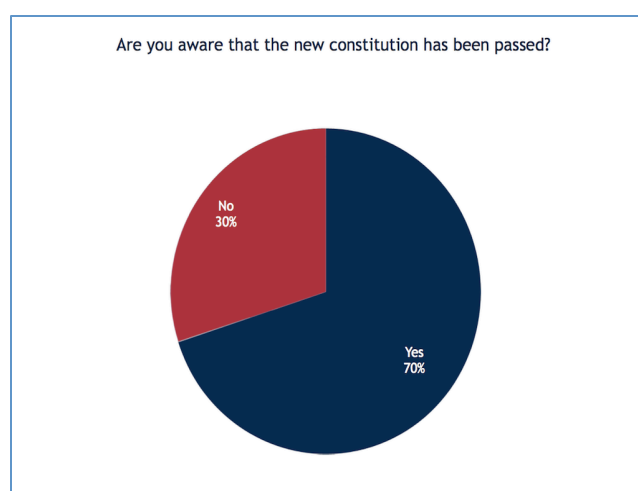
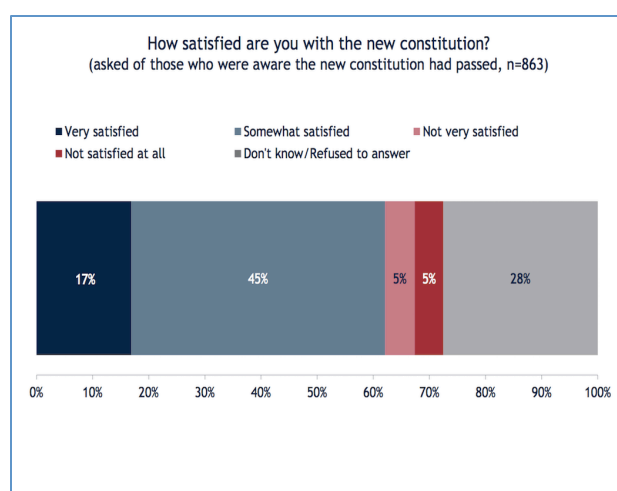


Figure 9: Respondents Satisfaction with new Constitution



1998, 1999, 2002, 2003, and 2008?⁵³

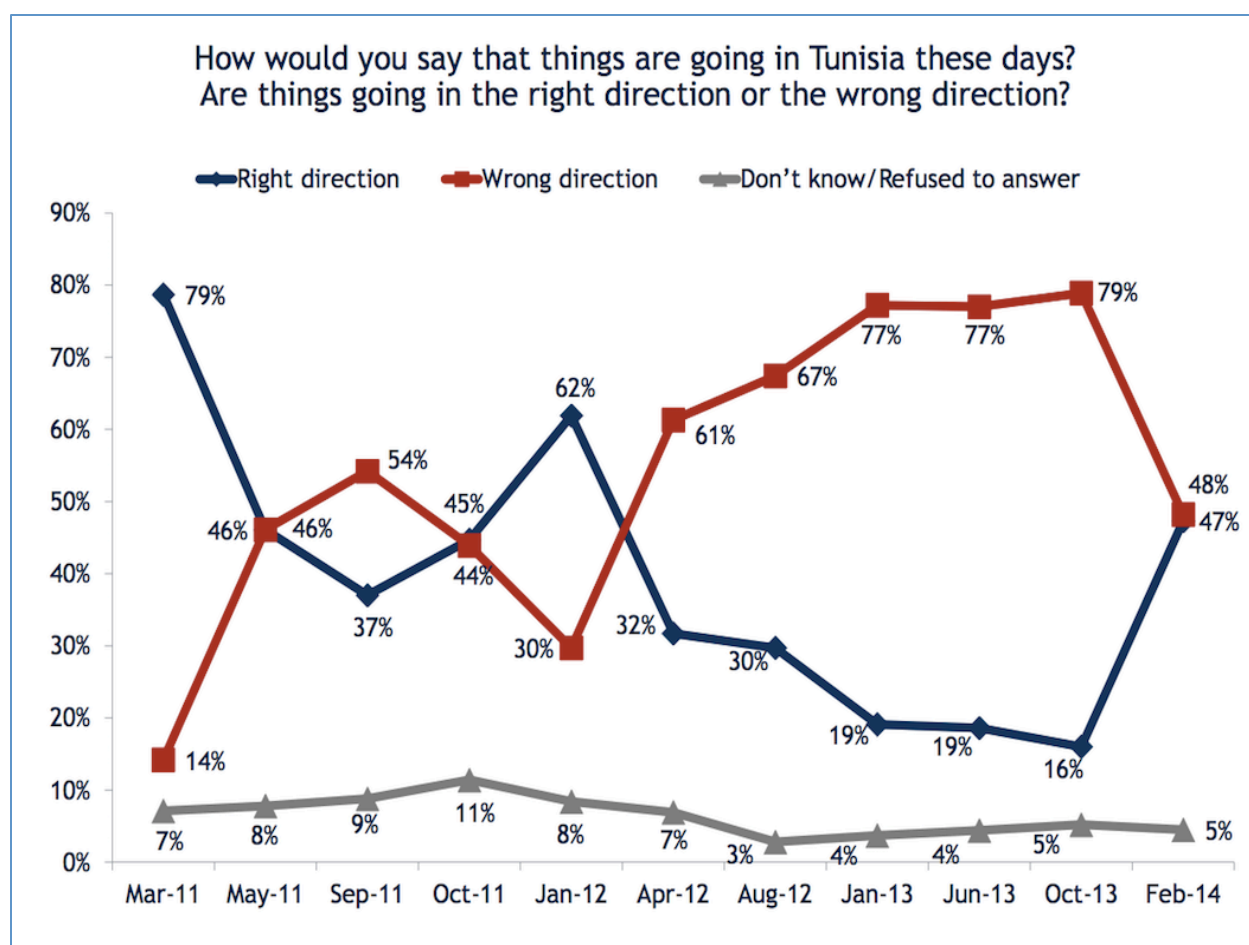
Survey data suggest that most Tunisians (70%) are aware that a new constitution has been passed for the country. The survey was conducted in the month immediately after the adoption of the constitution, an event that benefitted from great publicity. Of those who expressed knowledge about the new constitution, 62% expressed satisfaction with the constitution but 10% were unsatisfied. This result is not surprising considering that Tunisian society is deeply divided and Islamists and secularists have almost always been on opposite ends of the spectrum. For instance, the main point of contention during the drafting of the new constitution was religion's role in the government. Islamists believe that religion should be the basis of the state, a position rejected by secularists. In compromise, the constitution stipulates that Islam is the state religion but freedom of belief and worship is protected. The fact that most people express satisfaction with the constitution testifies to the great deal of interaction and negotiation among various constituents to create the kind of guidelines that would help not only to resolve existing fissures but also to stimulate economic growth and social development.

Perception of the Direction of Change and Leadership

By analysts' accounts, Tunisia is easily the "lone Arab Spring success story," considering persisting turmoil in the other Arab countries that experienced the Arab Spring. Egypt, which has successfully held elections – in which General Abdul Fattah el-Sisi, the former head of the Egyptian Army, transmuted to

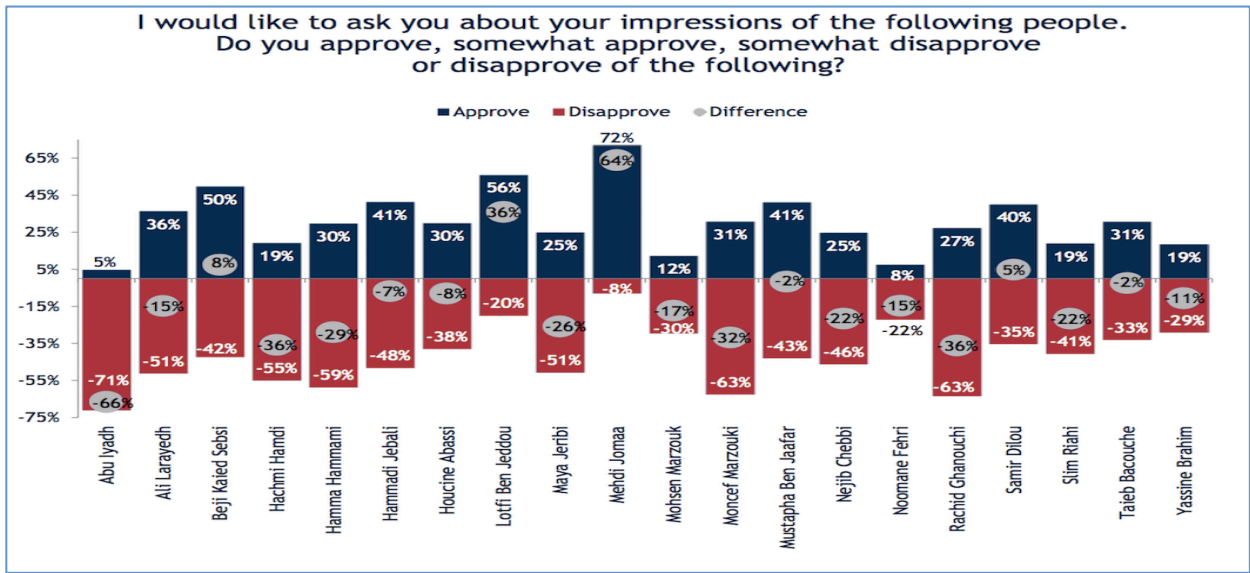
civilian president – is still unraveling. So also is Yemen, Libya, and Syria, which is the site of ongoing armed conflicts between the al-Assad regime and rebels on the one hand and between rebels (backed by Western countries including the United States) and ISIS/ISIL terrorists that have gone on rampage in Syria and Iraq, killing hundreds of people including Western citizens. But what do Tunisians think of the changes that have occurred in their country? Survey results indicate that immediately after the deposition of Ben Ali, Tunisians generally felt that the country was headed in the right direction. This is not unexpected considering that by March 2011, many Tunisians were basking in the unlikely success of their revolution and believed that with Ben Ali out of the picture, the trajectory of the state would be in the upward direction. 79% of respondents who answered the survey question, “... Are things going in the right direction or the wrong direction?” believed that things were going in the right direction in the country. Since then, opinions have vacillated widely from a high of 79% in March 2011 to 37% in September 2011, 62% in January 2012, an all-time low of 16% in October 2013, and 47% in February 2014. At least, compared to the same time period in 2013, Tunisians are more enthusiastic about the trajectory of the state in 2014, an important election year.

Figure 10: Respondents Perception of the Direction of Change in Tunisia



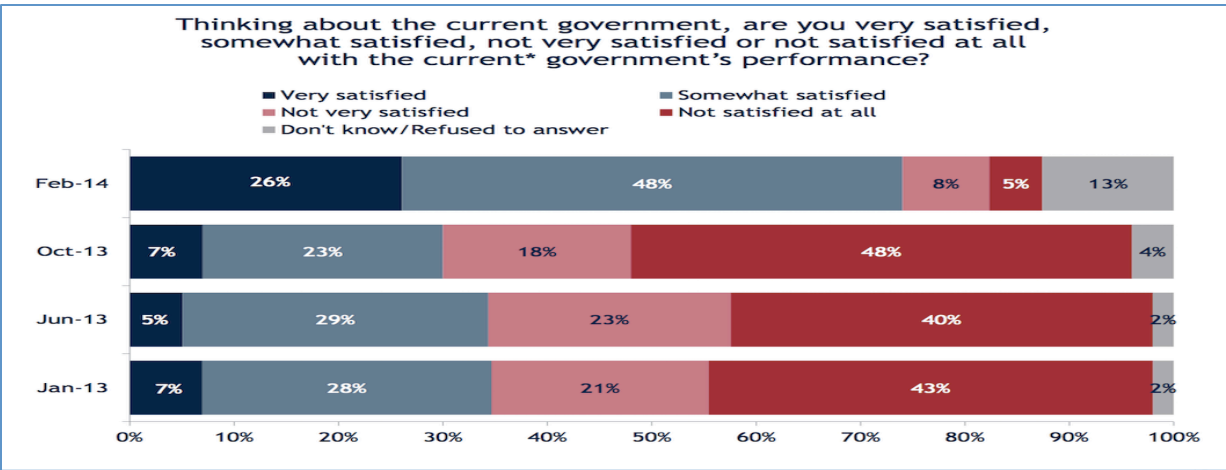
This relatively favorable outlook may be as much a verdict on the performance of Tunisia’s new prime minister, Mehdi Jomaa, who is generally believed to have performed well since he assumed the position on 29 January 2014. Jomaa enjoys the highest approval rating (72%) of any major political actor in Tunisia (Figure 4).

Figure 11: Respondents impressions of major political actors in Tunisia



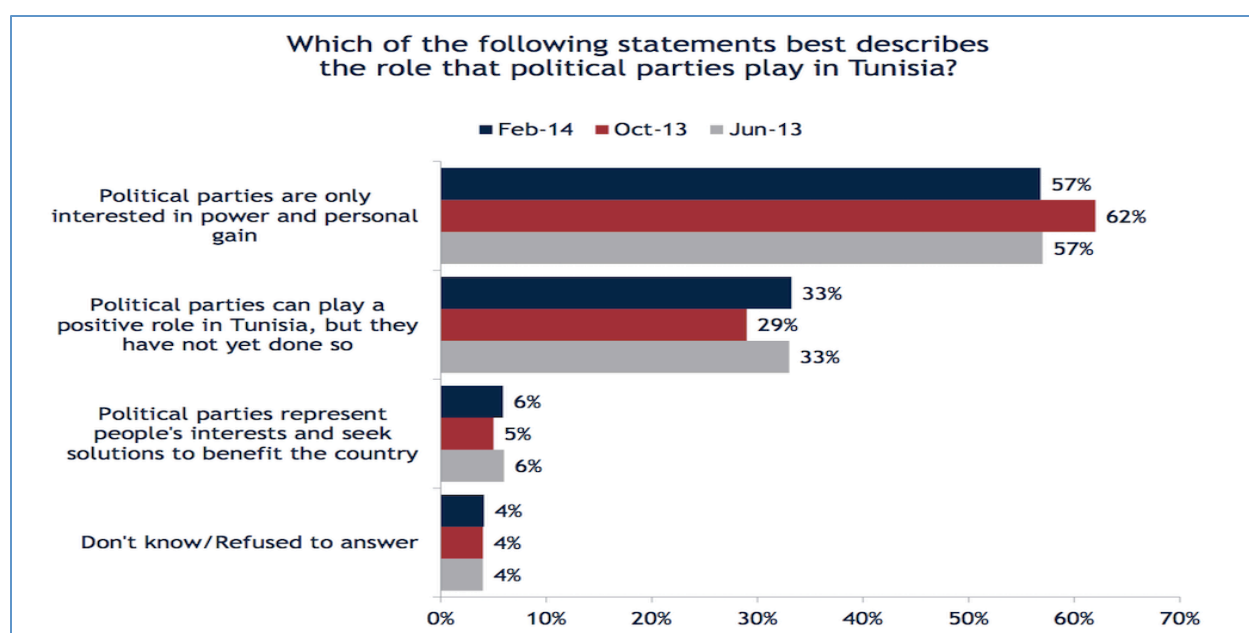
The above is buttressed by the fact that 26% (up from only 7% in the comparable period in 2013) are very satisfied and 48% (up from 28% in the comparable period in 2013) were somewhat satisfied with the current government’s performance. Conversely, only 8% (down from 21% in the comparable period in 2013) were not very satisfied and only 5% (down from 43% in the comparable period in 2013) were “not satisfied at all.”

Figure 12: Respondents perception of the performance of the current Tunisian government



While this means that Tunisians generally believe that the current leadership has performed well, they continue to be skeptical about the political class generally. In fact, only approximately 6% of respondents since June 2013 believe, “political parties represent people’s interests and seek solutions to benefit the country.” As figure 13 shows, as much as 57% of respondents in 2014 (down from 62% in October 2013) believe that political parties “are only interested in power and personal gain.” This result, despite the commendable efforts of the Tunisian Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE) to register voters, may affect not only turnout during the elections but also election outcomes. Voter apathy, which typically results from skepticism about the political system or the political class, is often an understated national security threat because it permits the election of incompetents whose performance in government may trigger anger and resentment including demonstrations, riots, and armed insurgencies.

Figure 13: Respondents perception of the role of political parties in Tunisia



Conclusion

A lot has been written about the conditions within Tunisia that spurred both the Jasmine and Arab Spring Revolutions. Analysts mainly blamed the revolutions on worsening economic conditions (compared to the opulent lifestyles of leaders), corruption by government officials including law enforcement and judicial workers, and the condensing of rights and freedom by the authoritarian regime. The revolutions, which started almost innocuously from the drastic action of a Tunisian peasant, claimed the long-standing regime of Ben Ali, spiraling to claim other long-standing regimes in Libya and Egypt. But since then, Tunisia has struggled to both to comprehend the revolutions and to recover from it. Critical to its recovery efforts is changing the socio-political system in order to make it more amenable to the needs of all Tunisians, not just a section of Tunisian society. Part of the effort in this direction is the enacting of a new constitution that replaced the 1959 constitution and the scheduling of parliamentary and presidential elections for October and November 2014.

While a great deal of the efforts to restructure Tunisia to address the past turmoil and to stimulate peace and development has been done in the public glare, very little information about how the people are seeing these changes and the efforts to create change is known. This report, therefore analyzes the important development that have taken place in Tunisia since the Jasmine Revolution, especially the perception of Tunisians about these events. The report shows that Tunisians are very concerned about the country's troubled history and are optimistic of a brighter future even though they continue to suffer negative economic conditions. The fact that the Tunisian economy has not rebounded or is rebounding too slowly is continuing source of worry. However, Tunisians are increasingly showing faith in the direction of change, particularly in the leadership of the incumbent prime minister, Mehdi Jomaa. They also express confidence in the security forces particularly the army that is engaged in efforts to stop terrorists operating near the country's border with Algeria.

More importantly, Tunisians are poised to vote new representatives in October and November. Elections in Africa are typically fractious events due principally to the fact that the state is often a monopolistic hegemon, dispensing favors, spurring or hampering growth and development, and expanding or constraining rights. In short, senior government officials across Africa, exercise powers that are often unprescribed by their country's laws and typically benefit from legitimate and illegitimate opportunities resulting from their government positions. In Tunisia, government officials have been known to be powerful and to use official powers to constrain freedoms and rights and to corruptly enrich themselves. And in a country with historically high unemployment and poverty rates and where the government is both the biggest employer of labor and the sole distributive or allocative authority, the struggle to fill elective positions is always fraught with the threat of violence. But in this election, because of the determination of Tunisians to instigate non-violent change this time around and the efforts of the electoral agency and security forces, the elections are very unlikely to produce violence. In terms of the likely election outcomes, the odds highly favor Nida Tounes to win a smaller victory than Enhadda did in the 2011 Constituent Assembly election. The likely Nida Tounes presidential candidate, Beji Kaied Sebsi, is also likely to win the president election in November.

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